



**TESTIMONY OF THE CONNECTICUT JUVENILE JUSTICE ALLIANCE
FOR THE EDUCATION COMMITTEE**

February 23, 2011

Supporting

**HB 6325: AN ACT CONCERNING JUVENILE REENTRY AND
EDUCATION**

Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann, and members of the Education Committee: This testimony is submitted by Abby Anderson, executive director of the Connecticut Juvenile Justice Alliance (Alliance) Steering Committee. The Alliance is a statewide, non-profit organization that works to reduce the number of children and youth entering the juvenile and criminal justice system, and advocates a safe, effective and fair system for those involved.

The Alliance supports House Bill 6325 which would require Connecticut school districts to accept the academic credits that children earn within the Department of Children and Families school district (Unified School District #2) in the same way that they must accept credits from any youth re-entering the district from another school, including the Department of Correction's Unified School District #1. This bill also requires schools to immediately enroll students transferring back from the justice system.

We know educational success and stability improve a child's chances for long-term community success. Now, educational reentry that happens quickly and ensures the child receives credit for the work he or she did in the juvenile justice system is not assured. Our partners who work with students in this situation on a daily basis tell us that it is rare. This legislation clearly defines the role and responsibilities of the justice system and the local or regional school districts in helping children reenter school.

The proposed change for USD #2 academic credit is of no-cost and is non-controversial; it is simply correcting an oversight. Without a guarantee of credit acceptance, students can return to their home school from a long-term placement thinking they have earned enough credits to be a junior, and instead be told that their credits won't transfer and they are still freshmen. This unfair situation creates frustration and a likelihood of dropout – which increases the risk of further delinquency.

The Alliance also supports this legislation's proposed changes regarding expulsion of students who are returning to a school district having been in juvenile detention, the Connecticut Juvenile Training School or another residential placement. Now, students sometimes face a double jeopardy situation. When they attempt to return to school, the district tells them that the expulsion hearing for the act that originally sent them into the justice system has been held in abeyance and instead of reentering school they are now beginning to serve their district imposed expulsion. This punishes a child twice for the same offense and further disconnects him or her from the school community and increases the chances that the child will drop out. Research shows that youth who drop out are more likely to be arrested than their graduated peers.

Thank you for the opportunity to present this testimony. Please let me know if you have any questions or would like additional information.